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ABSTRACT

The National Geographic Society is convinced that educational materials should be as lively, dynamic, and intriguing as the television, music videos, movies, and computer games that have so captured today's generation. To that end, a repertoire of pioneering feats in photography and innovative applications of computers, telecommunications, and multimedia educational tools have been developed for the classroom. For example, GTV, the product of a collaboration between the Society, California State Department of Education, Lucasfilm Ltd., and Apple Computer, is an interactive teaching tool combining videodisc and computer technologies in history and geography. The National Geographic Kids Network is an international telecommunications system designed to teach hands-on science with the help of computer-generated maps, modems, and telephone lines. And the newest addition to the electronic classroom is "Mammals: A Multimedia Encyclopedia," which is made up of clips from documentaries, pictures, and vocalizations, all coordinated by a computer. The National Geographic Society also recognizes that educational quality requires training for teachers, and has established a summer workshop institute for that purpose. (DB)

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# GOOD EDUCATION AND GOOD ENTERTAINMENT

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The names are all too familiar to parents and teachers—MTV, Nintendo, Game Boy. Today's students clearly are drawn to, and learn from, fast-paced, visual material presented in an electronic format. The National Geographic Society is convinced that educational materials should be as lively, dynamic, and intriguing as the TV, music videos, movies, and computer games that have so captured this generation.

There's a teacher's adage that says: To reach students you have to go in through their door and take them out through yours. The National Geographic Society has applied that philosophy over the past century, since the Society's second President, Alexander Graham Bell, hired a young teacher, Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor, to edit the Society's fledging magazine. Back then, the young teacher and the inventor teamed up to harness the era's newest technology—photography—to increase and diffuse geographic knowledge.

Our belief in the power of technology, harnessed by creative individuals, has lead us to pioneering feats in photography and, ultimately, to innovative applications of computers, telecommunications, and multimedia tools in the classroom. Numerous foundations, corporations, government agencies, and individuals have been generous in their support—motivated by a rising concern for the quality of education in this nation.

The result is a powerful repertoire of pioneering tools to meet the needs of today's teachers and students. For example, GTV, the product of a collaboration between the Society, the California State Department of Education, Lucasfilm Ltd., and Apple Computer, is a fast-paced, interactive teaching tool combining images from National Geographic's storehouse of photographs and film, the laser videodisc's instant access, and the computer's interactivity for students studying American history and geography.

The nation's story—from the first settlers and explorers to present-day people and landscapes—is presented on the GTV system's videodiscs in 40 chapters, including video, music, 1,800 pictures and maps, and varied, occasionally irreverent narrations; there's even a rap song that details the acquisition of U.S. territories. The software gives users the ability to manipulate the visual and editorial content themselves—Hollywood in the classroom. Students can produce multimedia research papers and practice their writing and speaking skills in the process.

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We are very pleased by educators' reactions to GTV. It is receiving critical acclaim everywhere it is demonstrated, and early reports from classroom users indicate that it is easy to use, highly motivational (particularly with marginal students), and effective in teaching content and higher-order thinking skills.

These are skills many students aren't learning in today's schools. This is not to say that blame can, or should, be placed at the teacher's doorstep. Teachers need modern tools to assist them in meeting today's challenges, and they are not getting what they need. Even the most creative teachers cannot compete day in and day out with the almost mystical power of the television, the computer, and telephone. Ironically, these are the very tools today's students will need to use when they enter the work force—yet schools are the last major institutions in the United States to adopt these new information technologies.

Could a major industry today survive without computers? Could a business survive without telephones accessible to the workers? It is a sad commentary that today we can send messages 3,000 miles across this country in an instant to almost any location—and still not get them the last 200 feet into one of the most important places in the nation, the classroom. Teachers are the only white-collar professionals without access to telephones in their primary place of work, the classroom.

As concerned citizens, we cannot stand by while schools try to survive with chalkboards and out-of-date textbooks.

By joining forces with the National Science Foundation and Technical Education Research Centers, the Society has harnessed telecommunications to help schools bridge the technology gap and help dissolve the boundaries between the classroom and the community. The program is National Geographic Kids Network. It's an international telecommunications system to teach hands-on science. It has been broadly available to schools for just over a year now, but it has already spread across the U.S. and has reached 26 foreign countries.

Students collect data, analyze it with the help of computer-generated maps and charts, and share their results, using modems and telephone lines. In one curriculum unit, students design and build their own rain collectors to measure the acidity of local rainwater, and compare their measurements with those taken by students throughout the network. Upcoming units cover weather, water resources, trash, and health-related matters. All these topics focus on real-world problems and involve students as they develop skills that will better equip them to be effective and productive citizens.

There is no question that these programs are expensive to produce, but we have endeavored to make them affordable. The question is not what it will cost, but what it will cost if we don't do it. As a nation, we are clearly paying the price for past investments not made in our children's future.

Using CD-ROM, we've just released our newest addition to the electronic classroom: "Mammals: A Multimedia Encyclopedia," which is a joint venture with IBM. "Mammals" brings the animal kingdom to life with 45 clips from the Society's TV documentaries, 700 pictures, and authentic vocalizations. And all of this emerges from a computer—not a television set, not an audio cassette player, but a computer; and it's totally under the user's control.

As we harness these new technologies, however, we must answer the plea for training we're hearing from teachers. To meet the demand, the Society is establishing a summer technology-training institute for teachers.

Throughout the National Geographic Society's 102-year history, advances in geographic exploration have been matched by technological innovations in publishing, enabling us to bring the world and all that's in it to our members.

Today's challenge is enabling students to gain access to information about the world and all that's in it. The information is available; we must simply help young people find it, sort it, and transform that information into knowledge. We at the Society are committed to meet the challenge. And we are eager to work with others in the business community also committed to bringing about a better future for our nation's children.